

Message Text

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SY-05 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-05 OMB-01 TRSE-00 OPR-02

A-01 PER-01 SCS-03 SCA-01 EB-07 COME-00 AGR-05 /128 W

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P R 111214Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9705

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL UDORN

USIA WASHDC

USMISSION USUN

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 4 PHNOM PENH 4409

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PFOR, MOPS, ECON, CB
SUBJECT: KHMER REPORT -- MARCH 11, 1975

GENERAL

1. THE PHNOM PENH INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION BEGAN TO HEAT UP AGAIN AS THE GKR PARLIAMENT ISSUED RESOLUTIONS DEMANDING A STRONG GOVERNMENT THAT CAN CONTROL THE MILITARY. HIGH-LEVEL SHAKEUPS OF BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERS ARE EXPECTED SHORTLY. THERE WAS ALSO CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION ABOUT PRESIDENT LON NOL IN THE WAKE OF HIS REPORTED WILLINGNESS TO STEP DOWN. IN WASHINGTON, THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE RELEASED A SUMMARY OF THE US EFFORTS TO SEEK AN EARLY COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT IN CAMBODIA. THESE AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN WASHINGTON RELATING TO THE ADMINISTRATION'S REQUEST FOR SUPPLEMENTAL AID TO THE GKR ARE FOLLOWED VERY CLOSELY BY KNOWLEDGEABLE KHMER HERE, AND THE STRONG AND RATHER VOCAL OPPOSITION IN THE US TO THE REQUEST IS HAVING A DECIDEDLY ADVERSE EFFECT ON MORALE. SIHANOUK, HIS IN-COUNTRY COLLEAGUES, AND THEIR ASIAN COMMUNIST ALLIES CONTINUED TO TRUMPET OPPOSITION TO MORE AMERICAN ASSISTANCE FOR CAMBODIA AND WHAT THEY TERMED THE THREAT OF DIRECT US INTERVENTION.
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THEY ALSO DENIED THAT A BLOOD BATH WOULD TAKE PLACE FOLLOWING A KC VICTORY. ON THE BATTLEFIELD, THERE WAS LITTLE CHANGE. THE KC CONTINUE TO LAUNCH HEAVY ROCKET AND ARTILLERY ATTACKS PRIMARILY AGAINST POCHENTING AIRFIELD.
NO PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN GETTING THE ROCKETS AND ARTILLERY OUT OF RANGE. FANK LOST ITS LAST POSITION ON THE POWER MEKONG BELOW NEAK LUONG,

BUT THE SITUATION IMPROVED SOMEWHAT AROUND NEAK LUONG
ITSELF AND IN THE EMBATTLED 7TH DIVISION AREA NORTHWEST OF
THE CAPITAL. ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT, PLANNING GOES
FORWARD FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW TITLE II RICE
PROGRAM FOR CAMBODIA.

POLITICAL (INTERNAL)

2. PRESIDENT LON NOL'S REPORTED REMARK TO A CON-
GRESSIONAL DELEGATION THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO RESIGN
IN THE CAUSE OF PEACE (LAST WEEK'S KHMER REPORT) PRE-
DICTABLY BECAME A PRIME TOPIC OF POLITICAL INTEREST IN
PHNOM PENH THIS WEEK. RUMORS BEGAN TO CIRCULATE THAT
THE MARSHAL HAD ALREADY DEPARTED FOR BANGKOK (ONE KHMER
LANGUAGE PAPER WAS CLOSED FOR SO STATING) AND LON NOL
ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE FILMED BY NEWSMEN AT CHAMCAR MON
TO LAY THESE STORIES TO REST. PRIME MINISTER LONG BORET
GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE IN WHICH HE SAID THAT LON NOL,
HIMSELF, AND MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT ARE ALL PREPARED
TO RESIGN SHOULD THAT HELP BRING PEACE. KHMER NEWS-
PAPERS PRAISED THE MARSHAL FOR HIS WILLINGNESS TO STEP
DOWN, EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT THIS SACRIFICE SHOULD
BE CONTINGENT UPON THE RETURN OF PEACE AND THE MAIN-
TENANCE OF THE REPUBLIC, AND SPECULATED UPON THE DIF-
FICULTY OF FINDING A SUCCESSOR TO LON NOL.

3. BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, CITING THE CUTTING OF
SUPPLY LINES INTO PHNOM PENH, "ANARCHY" IN THE CAPITAL
AND ELSEWHERE AND ALLEGED NEGLIGENCE ON THE PART OF
CERTAIN GKR AGENCIES, PASSED RESOLUTIONS THIS WEEK

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P R 111214Z MAR 75
FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9706
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMCONSUL BIEN HOA
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CALLING FOR THE INSTALLATION OF A STRONG GOVERNMENT.

THE RESOLUTIONS DEMANDED THAT THE ARMY BE MADE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LATTER BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS ACTS. COMMENT: THE RESOLUTIONS REPRESENT THE CULMINATION OF A LONG PERIOD OF WIDE-SCALE CIVILIAN DISCONTENT WITH CORRUPTION WITHIN FANK AND THE INABILITY OF THE CIVILIAN MINISTERS TO KEEP THEIR MILITARY COUNTERPARTS IN CHECK. THE FEELING HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE REFUSAL OF FANK COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ TO APPEAR BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT, SINCE HE CONTENTED HE WAS ANSWERABLE ONLY DIRECTLY TO THE PRESIDENT. SHAKEUPS ON BOTH THE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN SIDE ARE EXPECTED SHORTLY, ALTHOUGH PRIME MINISTER LONG BORET WILL STAY ON. SEVERAL UNSATISFACTORY MILITARY COMMANDERS HAVE ALREADY BEEN REPLACED, AS DESCRIBED IN THE MILITARY SECTION BELOW. WE BELIEVE THESE CHANGES COULD HAVE A MUCH NEEDED BOLSTERING EFFECT ON SAGGING KHMER MORALE. END COMMENT.

4. THE OFFICIAL GKR DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN HAS STRONGLY DENIED FOREIGN PRESS ARTICLES SPECULATING ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A "CONDITIONAL SURRENDER" BY FANK. CALLING SUCH STORIES TENDENTIOUS AND BASED ON "MALEVOLENT" SPECULATION, THE GKR STATEMENT AFFIRMS THE DETERMINATION OF THE KHMER PEOPLE TO CONTINUE THEIR STRUGGLE FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND LIBERTY. IT EMPHASIZES THAT THE DESIRE OF THE GKR FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION SHOULD NOT BE INTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS OR SURRENDER.

5. THE KHMER PRESS AND POLITICALLY-SOPHISTICATED CAMBODIANS ARE FOLLOWING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US JUST AS CLOSELY AS EVENTS IN CAMBODIA ITSELF. STATEMENTS AND OPINIONS ATTRIBUTED TO ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS, REACTIONS BY SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN (PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO CAME HERE), AND THE COMMENTARY OF LEADING AMERICAN PRESS MEDIA ARE MONITORED VERY CLOSELY. THE PICTURE PRESENTED OF AN AMERICA RELUCTANT TO GIVE THE GKR THE WHEREWITHAL TO CONTINUE TO FIGHT IS CERTAINLY A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE SENSE OF MALAISE THAT PREVAILS IN PHNOM PENH AT THE MOMENT.

POLITICAL (EXTERNAL)

6. ON MARCH 5, THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE RELEASED A SUMMARY OF THE "CONTINUAL AND NUMEROUS" PRIVATE INITIATIVES MADE BY THE USG IN THE SEARCH FOR AN EARLY COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT IN CAMBODIA. THESE INCLUDED AMONG OTHERS "PROMISING" EFFORTS IN 1973 WHICH WERE ENDED BY THE AUGUST 15, 1973 BOMBING HALT, A PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CAMBODIA AND SEVERAL ATTEMPTS

THROUGH INTERMEDIARIES AND DIRECTLY TO ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH SIHANOUK OR KHMER ROUGE LEADERSHIP. THE SUMMARY ENUNCIATED THE THREE PRINCIPLES WHICH HAVE GUIDED THE USG IN SEEKING A SETTLEMENT: (A) US SUPPORT FOR ANY NEGOTIATIONS THAT THE PARTIES THEMSELVES ARE PREPARED TO SUPPORT; (B) US ACCEPTANCE OF ANY OUTCOME FROM NEGOTIATIONS THAT THE PARTIES THEMSELVES WILL ACCEPT AND (C) "AS FAR AS THE US IS CONCERNED, THE PERSONALITIES INVOLVED WILL NOT, THEMSELVES, CONSTITUTE OBSTACLES OF ANY KIND TO A SETTLEMENT." ASSISTANT SECRETARY HABIB MET WITH THE PRESS WHEN THE SUMMARY WAS RELEASED.

7. AS THE KC PRESSURE AROUND PHNOM PENH CONTINUES, MOST FOREIGN EMBASSIES ARE TAKING STEPS TO REDUCE THEIR OFFICIAL STAFFS AND EVACUATE DEPENDENTS AND PRIVATE
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NATIONALS. THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE, BRITISH AND AUSTRALIAN EMBASSIES HAVE ALL BROUGHT IN, OR WILL BRING IN, AIRPLANES FOR THIS PURPOSE. THE ISRAELI EMBASSY IS TEMPORARILY CLOSING DOWN, AS ITS THREE-MEMBER STAFF IS GOING FOR NOW TO VIENTIANE WHERE THE AMBASSADOR IS ALSO ACCREDITED. IN VIEW OF THE ERRATIC FLIGHT PERFORMANCE OF AIR CAMBODGE, THE ONLY INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE STILL OPERATING OUT OF PHNOM PENH, THE EMBASSY HAS MADE ITS AIR ASSETS AVAILABLE TO FRIENDLY EMBASSIES ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS. THE THAI, JAPANESE, PHILIPPINE AND ROC MISSIONS HAVE REDUCED NUMBERS IN THIS WAY. WE HAVE EVACUATED ALL AMERICAN DEPENDENTS FROM PHNOM PENH, BUT THE OFFICIAL MISSION STAFF REMAINS AT FULL STRENGTH.

8. PRESIDENT THIEU HAS TOLD JAPANESE NEWSMEN THAT ARVN TROOPS WILL NOT INTERVENE IN CAMBODIA. THAI OFFICIALS HAVE INDICATED AS WELL THEIR HOPE THAT THE US CAN CONTINUE TO HELP CAMBODIA, BUT THE THAIS ARE NOT ANXIOUS TO TAKE ANY ACTION THEMSELVES.

9. THE GKR AMBASSADOR TO THAILAND, TIM NGUON DIED ON MARCH 8 OF A HEART ATTACK AT THE AGE OF 55. BEFORE BEING NAMED TO BANGKOK IN 1972, HE HAD BEEN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRALIA.

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TRSE-00 OPR-02 A-01 PER-01 SCS-03 SCA-01 EB-07 COME-00

AGR-05 /134 W

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P R 111214Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9707

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 4 PHNOM PENH 4409

10. AT THE REQUEST OF THE GKR MISSION TO THE UN, THE UN SECRETARIAT HAS CIRCULATED THE FEB 15 LETTER FROM FOREIGN MINISTRY KEUKY LIM TO UNSYG WALDHEIM CONCERNING THE DAKAR CONFERENCE OF THE GROUP OF 77. THE LETTER NOTES THE CONFERENCE RESOLUTION ON CAMBODIA AND REQUESTS WALDHEIM TO USE HIS INFLUENCE TO PREVENT UN ECONOMIC MEETING FROM BEING USED FOR "POLITICAL ENDS." AT THE 31ST SESSION OF THE ESCAP CONFERENCE IN NEW DELHI VARIOUS GRUNK SUPPORTERS MADE ANTI-GKR STATEMENTS IN PLENARY FOR THE RECORD, BUT THE GKR REMAINED A FULL PARTICIPANT THROUGH THE CONFERENCE.

GRUNK/FUNK

11. BOTH SIHANOUK AND IN-COUNTRY PROPAGANDA KEPT UP A BARRAGE OF ATTACKS AGAINST WHAT THEY CALLED THE FUTILE AMERICAN POLICY IN CAMBODIA, AND THE EFFORTS OF THE USG TO SECURE MORE ASSISTANCE FOR THE GKR. GRUNK/FUNK'S ASIAN COMMUNIST ALLIES ALSO CONTRIBUTED CONSIDERABLY TO THE ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN. SIHANOUK ON MARCH 3 REITERATED IN HARSH TERMS THAT GRUNK/FUNK WILL NEVER NEGOTIATE WITH THE PHNOM PENH "LACKEYS" AND THAT NO CONFIDENTIAL

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AMOUNT OF NEW US AID CAN SAVE THE GKR WHICH WILL FALL SHORTLY. HE "WARNED"THE US THAT IF IT DOES NOT END ITS AIRLIFT TO PHNOM PENH AND PERSISTS IN GIVING NEW AID, THEN IT WILL "NO LONGER BE POSSIBLE" FOR THE US AND GRUNK TO RESTORE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. THE PRINCE FOLLOWED THIS UP ON MARCH 7 WITH ANOTHER STATEMENT ALLEGING US PREPARATIONS TO INTERVENE DIRECTLY IN CAMBODIA, CITING AS EVIDENCE THE AIRLIFT, THE PROPOSED NEW ASSISTANCE AND US "WARSHIPS" WITH MARINES ABOARD STATIONED

IN NEARBY WATERS. (NCNA COVERAGE DELETED SOME OF THE MORE FLAMBOYANT SIHANOUK RHETORIC, BUT THE GENERAL THEME OF THE MARINES LINKED TO AN IMPENDING US "INTERVENTION" WAS A POPULAR ONE WITH GRUNK ALLIES, PARTICULARLY HANOI).

12. SIHANOUK ALSO GAVE AN INTERVIEW TO LE MONDE. HE REFERRED TO THE RECENTLY COMPLETED GRUNK/FUNK "NATIONAL CONGRESS" AND ITS DECISION TO GRANT "COMPLETE AMNESTY" TO ALL ON THE GKR SIDE EXCEPT THE "SEVEN TRAITORS" WHO MUST BE KILLED (SEE LAST WEEK'S KHMER REPORT). CITING THIS AND RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH IENG SARY (PRESENTLY IN PEKING), SIHANOUK DENIED THERE WOULD BE A BLOOD BATH IF THE KC TOOK OVER. COMMENT: SIHANOUK'S REMARKS AND A PLETHORA OF OTHER PROPAGANDA COMMENTARIES MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THE NATIONAL CONGRESS IS BEING BUILT UP AS A MAJOR EVENT AND ITS DECISIONS AS KEY POLICY STATEMENTS. IN PARTICULAR, THE THEME THAT ONLY OJ SEVEN "TRAITORS" MUST DIE IS NOW BEING STRESSED REPEATEDLY IN KC BROADCASTS. THIS IS PROBABLY DESIGNED TO SERVE THE DOUBLE PURPOSE OF APPEALING TO WAVERING ELEMENTS INSIDE CAMBODIA AND TO REBUT GROWING SPECULATION ABROAD ABOUT POSSIBLE MASSACRES IN THE WAKE OF A KC VICTORY. END COMMENT.

13. MOSCOW, WHICH GENERALLY HAS NOT DEVOTED MUCH SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT TO THE CAMBODIA SITUATION, SUDDENLY CHANGED ITS TUNE WITH THREE RECENT SIGNED COMMENTARIES ON THE SUBJECT. THE ARTICLES HIGHLIGHT KC MILITARY SUCCESSES, GKR WEAKNESSES, THE "NATIONAL CONGRESS" AND MOSCOW SUPPORT FOR THE "LIBERATION FORCES". HOWEVER, CRITICISM OF THE US IS MUTED. EMBASSY MOSCOW CONFIDENTIAL

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BELIEVES THAT THE KREMLIN'S DECISION TO WEIGHT IN NOW PROBABLY REFLECTS ITS BELIEF THAT THE KC ARE CLOSE TO VICTORY AND THAT THE US CONGRESS WILL PROVIDE INSUFFICIENT AID TO PREVENT THIS.

ECONOMIC

14. UNDER THE NEWLY AUTHORIZED TITLE II RICE PROGRAM FOR CAMBODIA (SEE LAST WEEK'S KHMER REPORT), DELIVERIES BEGAN MARCH 5 WITH AIRLIFTED RICE BEING MOVED TO A SPECIALLY DESIGNATED WAREHOUSE FROM WHICH VOLUNTARY AGENCIES WILL MAKE DIRECT WITHDRAWALS UPON APPROVAL OF THE MINISTRY OF REFUGEES. THE FIRST TITLE II DISTRIBUTION WAS MADE IN PHNOM PENH ON MARCH 7. IT IS ESTIMATED THE REFUGEE AND OTHER NEEDY CATEGORIES WILL REACH A TOTAL REQUIREMENT OF 3,600 TONS PER MONTH. ON MARCH 11, USAID

AND VOLUNTARY AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES MET WITH THE GKR
TO DEVELOP FURTHER PLANS FOR THE TITLE II PROGRAM.

15. RICE STOCKS IN PHNOM PENH ON MARCH 10 TOTALLED
8,454 METRIC TONS BROKEN DOWN AS FOLLOWS:

U.S. RICE, PRE-AIRLIFT	473
AIRLIFTED U.S. RICE	4,998
BATTAMBANG RICE	2,983
	8,454

THESE STOCKS REPRESENT 15.5 DAYS SUPPLY AT THE CURRENT
DAILY DISTRIBUTION RATE OF 545 M/T PER DAY, BUT ONLY 13
DAYS SUPPLY AT THE PROJECTED MINIMUM RATE OF 650 M/T
DAILY WHEN DISTRIBUTION IS INCREASED UNDER THE TITLE II
PROGRAM. PLANS ARE UNDERWAY TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF

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P R 111214Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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SORTIES TO MEET THE NEW MINIMUM. FROM FEBRUARY 27, WHEN THE RICE AIRLIFT FROM SAIGON STARTED, THROUGH MARCH 9, THERE HAVE BEEN 124 SORTIES FLOWN, DELIVERING 4,998 M/T OR A DAILY AVERAGE OF 11 SORTIES/454 M/T.

16. DURING THE PERIOD MARCH 4 -9 134.6 CUBIC METERS OF KEROSENE WERE AIRLIFTED FROM SAIGON. THE C-130 AIRLIFT OF CIVILIAN POL PRODUCTS FROM THAILAND ALSO BEGAN MARCH 4, AT THE RATE OF 20 CUBIC METERS OF MOGAS AND 100 CUBIC METERS OF AVIATION DIESEL OIL PER DAY.

17. EXCEPT FOR CHARCOAL, WHICH WENT UP 17 PERCENT, PRICES WERE RELATIVELY UNCHANGED IN PHNOM PENH MARKETS DURING THE PAST WEEK. LOCAL RICE INCREASED 4 PERCENT; ORANGES 7 PERCENT; AND SALT 7 PERCENT. CONVERSELY, PORK DECLINED 7 PERCENT; SUGAR 5 PERCENT; AND DRY FISH 8 PERCENT. THE PRICE CHANGES PARTLY REFLECT SEASONAL TRENDS. IN ADDITION,

MARKET ACTIVITY APPEARS TO BE OFF SLIGHTLY DUE TO SPORADIC ROCKET ATTACKS DIRECTED TOWARDS THE CENTER OF THE CITY, AND LINGERING PRESSURE AGAINST MERCHANTS BY STUDENT ACTIVISTS. MANY SHOPS IN MARKET AREAS ARE STILL CLOSED. ALSO, THERE ARE PERSISTENT REPORTS THAT PRODUCERS IN OUTLYING AREAS ARE SELLING SHORT BECAUSE OF UNCERTAIN SECURITY CONDITIONS. FINALLY, THE CUMULATIVE

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IMPACT OF CONTINUING HYPERINFLATION SEEMS TO BE MANIFESTING ITSELF IN REDUCED CONSUMER PURCHASING POWER. THE BLACK MARKET EXCHANGE RATE INCREASED SLIGHTLY DURING THE WEEK, FROM 2,000 TO 2,055 RIELS PER DOLLAR, WHILE THE OFFICIAL RATE WAS HELD STEADY AT 1,650 RIELS PER DOLLAR. GOLD SLIPPED FROM 165 TO 160 DOLLARS PER TROY OUNCE.

MILITARY

18. THE CITY OF PHNOM PENH RECEIVED INCOMING ROCKET FIRE DURING THE WEEK, BUT BY FAR THE GREATEST NUMBER OF ROUNDS WERE FIRED BY THE KC AT POCHENTONG AIRFIELD. WHILE MOST WERE 107MM ROCKETS, THERE WERE ALSO PERIODIC 105 HOWITZER SHELLS, WHICH ARE CONSIDERABLY MORE ACCURATE. DESPITE THE CONSTANT ATTACKS, OFTEN MOUNTING TO MORE THAN 40 ROUNDS PER DAY, THE DAMAGE TO THE AIRPORT HAS BEEN RELATIVELY SLIGHT AND THE U.S. AIRLIFT OF RICE, AMMUNITION AND FUEL PRODUCTS HAS PROCEEDED ON SCHEDULE FOR THE MOST PART. ONE DC-8 WAS DAMAGED BY 105MM SHRAPNEL BUT RETURNED TO SAIGON SAFELY. THE FANK OPERATION NORTH OF ROUTE 4 AND WEST OF POCHENTONG WHICH STARTED MARCH 6 AND IS DESIGNED TO PUSH THE KC GUNNERS OUT OF RANGE OF POCHENTONG HAS SO FAR MADE NEGLIGIBLE PROGRESS. IT HAS BEEN HAMPERED BY COORDINATION PROBLEMS AND A LACK OF FANK AGGRESSIVENESS COMBINED WITH STIFF ENEMY RESISTANCE.

19. THE GOVERNMENT SITUATION ALONG THE LOWER MEKONG DETERIORATED EVEN FURTHER WHEN TROOPS AT THE LAST FRIENDLY POSITION BETWEEN NEAK LUONG AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE BORDER WERE EVACUATED MARCH 7. IT APPEARS THAT LACK OF DISCIPLINE AMONG THESE TROOPS MADE THE EVACUATION A NECESSITY. IN ANY CASE, ALTHOUGH THE LOSS OF THE POSITION PUTS THE REOPENING OF THE MEKONG EVEN FARTHER OFF, THE EVACUATION HAS HELPED STABILIZE THE SITUATION AROUND NEAK LUONG AND BANAM. KC PRESSURE IS STILL HEAVY IN THE AREA, BUT THE ROAD BETWEEN NEAK LUONG AND BANAM HAS BEEN REOPENED, AND THE DEFENSIVE PERIMETER STEADIED SOMEWHAT.

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20. NORTHWEST OF PHNOM PENH, THE KC CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE THROUGH NIGHTLY GROUND ATTACKS AND ATTACKS BY FIRE AGAINST THE BATTERED TROOPS OF THE 7TH DIVISION. THE KC EARLY IN THE WEEK CUT THE ROAD RUNNING THROUGH THE DIVISION AREA AND THEN INFILTRATED FURTHER SOUTH TOWARDS PHNOM PENH. HOWEVER, FANK REACTED RAPIDLY, CUT OFF THE INFILTRATION AND REPORTEDLY KILLED 143 KC IN ONE ENGAGEMENT. CLEARING OPERATIONS CONTINUE AND THE INSTALLATION OF A NEW, AGGRESSIVE DIVISION COMMANDER (SEE BELOW) HAS RESULTED IN THE ROAD BEING TENUOUSLY REOPENED THROUGH TO THE DIVISION LOGISTICS BASE. NORTHEAST OF PHNOM PENH, THE SITUATION WAS RELATIVELY QUIET AND FANK SCORED A GOOD SUCCESS MARCH 10 BY KILLING 35 KC. SOUTH-WEST OF PHNOM PENH, THE 3RD DIVISION SUCCESSFULLY LINKED UP WITH THE SECOND OF ITS TWO ISOLATED BATTALIONS (SEE LAST WEEK'S KHMER REPORT) KILLING ABOUT 300 ENEMY SOLDIERS IN SO DOING.

21. OUTSIDE OF PHNOM PENH, THERE WAS LITTLE CHANGE. THE SOUTHWESTERN CITY OF KAMPOT IS GETTING STEADY ENEMY PRESSURE AND MOUNTING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES WHILE HOLDING ITS REDUCED PERIMETER. THE RETURN OF EX-GOVERNOR MG SEK SAM IET TO BATTAMBANG SEEMS INITIALLY TO HAVE RE-ENERGIZED PREVIOUSLY DEMORALIZED MILITARY (AND CIVILIAN) OFFICIALS. FANK DEFENDERS PERFORMED WELL AROUND THE PROVINCIAL CAPITALS OF PREY VENG AND PURSAT. THEY ALSO RETOOK A POSITION ON THE LOVEK PERIMETER ABOUT 20 MILES NORTH OF PHNOM PENH, KILLING 100 KC.

22. NEWLY PROMOTED KG KHY HAK TOOK OVER THE 7TH DIVISION ON MARCH 9, REPLACING BG DENG LAYOM WHO HAD NOT BEEN IMPRESSIVE DURING THE COURSE OF THE ENEMY DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE. KHY HAK IS NOTED FOR HIS PERSONAL COURAGE AND MAY BE ABLE TO BRING SOME LIFE INTO A BADLY SHATTERED DIVISION. IN A SECOND CHANGE, BG YONG YOC HANG REPLACED BG CHHIM CHHUON AS PHNOM PENH MILITARY SUBDIVISION COMMANDER ALTHOUGH CHHIM CHHUON STILL RETAINS OTHER FUNCTIONS IN THE CAPITAL REGION. THE SHIFT MAY HAVE SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL AS WELL AS MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE, SINCE CHHIM CHHUON IS WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE AMONG THE MOST CORRUPT FANK GENERALS, WHILE YONG YOC HANG'S REPUTATION IS

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RELATIVELY GOOD.

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